

# Jubilarian Mass

written by Arkansas Catholic Staff |

The Diocese of Little Rock will host a Jubilarian Mass Wednesday, June 25, at 5:30 p.m. at the Cathedral of St. Andrew in Little Rock for priests who celebrate 25, 50, 60 and 65 years of service in 2024 and 2025.

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## Sister parish in Haiti finds success despite civil unrest

written by Alesia Schaefer |



Haiti is a country in crisis. Family members and even those bringing aid or supplies can only watch helplessly because traveling to the island country poses risks.

No one understands this more than Father Rodolphe Balthazar, who came to Arkansas in 2019 and serves as the associate pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Rogers. In April, he was incardinated into the Diocese of Little Rock, officially becoming a diocesan priest. In May, Father Balthazar received his master's degree in counseling from Missouri State University and wanted to visit home to celebrate but knew that would be an impossibility.

Since 2021 and the assassination of President Jovenal Moïse, chaos has wracked the small country that has for decades been victim to both natural disasters and political corruption. The isolation of the pandemic facilitated the spiraling of the country's economy, making it more susceptible to gang violence.

Celebrating his accomplishment was bittersweet as most family members could not leave Haiti to be with him due to the destabilization of the country. Instead, Father Balthazar planned a vacation in Canada with a sister and brother to meet up with friends and travel for a few weeks.

Yet, what is happening in his home country of Haiti torments him. "I worry about my mother," said Father Balthazar said.

"My mother is ill and must go to the hospital for her doctor visits," he said. "We received a message explaining my mom would be held hostage if a ransom was not paid in advance. My siblings felt very pressured to meet their demands, but in the end, we did not give them money. My mother was not kidnapped, but the incident kept her from the care she needed and from going to the hospital so she became very ill. We knew the authorities could not help us."

This illustrates the lack of protection or security for civilians and that the police presence has all but disappeared where gangs have control. Even still, away from the capital of Port-au-Prince, the economic unrest can be felt as inflation has skyrocketed. But in Bombardopolis and the sister parish of St. Francis of Assisi that St. Vincent de Paul sponsors, there is some normalcy.

"The community of Bombardopolis is safe," Deacon Ronnie Hoyt, who serves as the Haiti Ministry team leader, said. "The schools are open, and they celebrated their eighth high school graduating class of 20 students in May."

More good news, according to Hoyt, is despite the political unrest in Haiti, the sister parish has seen growth and positive outcomes.

"Since the high school began, they have graduated 146 students, and five students have gone on to graduate from college with one receiving a degree in agronomics from the University of GOC-Port-au-Prince, in Haiti," Hoyt said.

One of the biggest challenges, said Father Adner Edouardo, pastor and administrator of St. Francis of Assisi School, is for those students who are fleeing violence in the bigger cities and seeking shelter in the smaller towns.

"We do not have a special program for them as they come at different times and with varying degrees of education and cannot offer an official exam because their education has been disrupted," Father Edouardo said in a phone interview. "It is difficult because we cannot accept them all."

Although St. Vincent de Paul parishioners cannot travel to the country because of safety concerns and goods cannot be shipped to the parish because of theft, Hoyt said \$15,500 was donated to the parish and school for maintenance and repair projects, including the installation of 32 windows in the school buildings. Some of those funds were also used to buy 60 new wooden benches for classrooms and three new metal doors.

“An additional donation of \$4,000 was also made for school supplies and activities,” Hoyt said.

Despite the current state of affairs, Father Balthazar said he remains hopeful a new president will be appointed and that the current council represented by various political members in the country will be allowed to work toward peace.

“There is some progress and currently there are some Kenyan armed forces on the ground to work to maintain some stability and other countries are sending aid to feed the people and help fight against the gangs,” he said.

“We still have a long way to go, but we did and are still doing what makes a difference in the people of Haiti’s lives,” Father Balthazar said. “We must pray for those in Haiti, and sometimes that is the best we can do.”